DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 027 522 AL 001 720

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Pub Date 18 Feb 69

Note-15p.; Paper presented at meeting of the Anthropological Society of Washington, Washington, D.C., February 18, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.85

Descriptors-Cultural Differences, *Dialect Studies, English, Language Styles, Negative Forms (Language), *Negro Dialects, Nonstandard Dialects, *Sex Differences, *Social Dialects, Social Structure, *Sociolinguistics

Identifiers-*Detroit Language Study

This paper focusses on sex contrasts in language as revealed in recent sociolinguistic research. While there are relatively few differences in subjective language identifications and judgments, there are several clear differences in objective language data. In the Detroit Language Study, women show a greater "sensitivity" to multiple negation as an index of social stratification than men. Women use less pronominal apposition than do men, but there is a significant difference between men and women only in the lower middle class group. Within the Negro population, women reduce word final consonant clusters, delete "r," and alter median "th" significantly less than men. Some possible explanations are suggested but no conclusions are established. This report is based on the corpus which provided the data for related documents AL 001 721 and ED 022 155. (MK)

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Sex as a Factor in Sociolinguistic Research

Anthropological Society of Washington
February 18, 1969
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In Ogden Nash's recent but little known poem called "Mr. Minikin's Darkest Hour, or, What Will Be Won't Be," (Saturday Review, July 20, 1968) he notes a common but infrequently discussed aspect of the English language, namely, that women speak differently from men. In the early lines of the poem, Nash describes a vacation trip of his friend, Mr. Minikin, who "has just learned how a marriage can suddenly go as wrong as four martinis before lunch" and his wife, who is quite upset because her husband has driven right by the antique shop which she just spotted. Minikin offers to turn back. She says, "No, never mind." He retorts, "Mea culpa." She replies that she knows how much antiques bore him. Then, in a grand gesture of masculine good will "He... promised her faithfully that they would halt at that very antique shop on their way home eight weeks hence." At this point, let me quote the rest of the poem:

> And that was when he was clobbered by a
> verb inflection unknown to males or
> grammarians, the future imperfect tense.
>
> After a jiffy journey in her time machine she
> accused him of going to not have stopped at
> that or any other antique shop for ever and
> ever, and thereby achieved an object an unique
> as sublime;
>
> By not speaking to him again until they were
> below Charleston she managed to let the present
> actual punishment precede the future potential
> crime.

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This example of the baffling language differences between the sexes joins the meagre literature on the subject ranging from Theodor Reik's article "Men and Women Speak Different Languages" (1954) to Mary Haas's study of such differences in Muskogean languages (1964) and Otto Jesperson's Language, Its Nature, Development and Origin (1922), in which Rochefort's seventeenth century account of the language differences of men and women in the Antilles is cited, possibly for the first time. Recent researchers have given only passing attention to the phenomenon, noting limited vocabulary in particular, stemming from activities to which women are barred (in Surinam) from taboo expressions (as in Micronesia), or from task specializations related to sex (Weinreich 1964 and Hertzler 1954). Joyce Hertzler observes that over-all there are few such differences and those that remain are generally slight accentuations of taboos of language forms, of greeting behaviors and of courtesy codes. With the rise of sexual equality one might well expect the final breakdown of linguistic correlates of sex differences in America. That such correlations are still maintained in our times, however, should be evident from the data which follow in this paper. The extent of these correlations and what causes them to be maintained should be the subject of more extensive research than we have given the subject to date.

The Missing Evidence

Perhaps the subject of linguistic correlates of sex differences has been overlooked because the topic has been too close for careful observation. The linguistic processes involved in receiving communications, at least in the consultative realm, tend to gear to understanding the semantic load of speech, not to the phonology or grammar.

That is, we are so busy trying to understand what is said that we pay little conscious attention to how it is said. And only if what is said varies beyond our tolerance range of expectation does the speech call attention to itself. Evidence of this fantastic ability of listeners to suspend their disbelief can be found in the work of ventriloquists such as Edgar Bergen, whose series of near misses in pronunciation, caused by a desire to not move the lips, will be almost completely tolerated. For grammatical tolerance, the talented comedian, Professor Irwin Corey, in his monologues filled with nonsense or doubletalk, has clearly demonstrated that listeners will tolerate a great deal as they listen sympathetically. Both Bergen and Corey, for different purposes, stretch the tolerance range of the English language to its extremeties. Most speakers do not come close to the margins of these tolerance ranges. If they do, the miscommunication is more likely to be blamed on the hearing of the listener or on some outside noise interference.

Regardless of why the correlation of linguistic performance to sex has been overlooked in the past, there has been, and is, sufficient reason for examining it carefully. If girls are more agile with language than boys or if they are more normative in some way, this suggests something important about how they are taught. Most teachers on all levels will observe that girls are more linguistically talented than boys. In many cases, this reflects only the female domination of the classroom and the whole question of linguistic correlates of sex is a part of the larger matter of female values in the overall teaching situation, ranging anywhere from deductive rather than inductive learning to the great premium placed on quietness in the schools. William Labov, in fact, has studied

an aspect of this problem, observing that illiteracy among teen age New York gang members is directly proportionate to his acceptance by the peer-group. And despite the post-sputnik emphasis on education, many intelligent boys who are more concerned about peer-group status than teacher approval will clam-up in the classroom even though they may be perfectly able to respond to their teacher's questions.

Despite the rather subjective feelings of educators, psychologists and linguists concerning the differences between males and females in their use of language, very little research has had the opportunity to describe these differences. One problem has to do with the research design required for such a study. It is one thing to casually observe that women use the future imperative of Ogden Nash's poem, but is quite another matter if we want to prove it. Research in current sociolinguistics has now taken steps to provide such strategies, particularly as quantitative rather than qualitative analysis is undertaken.

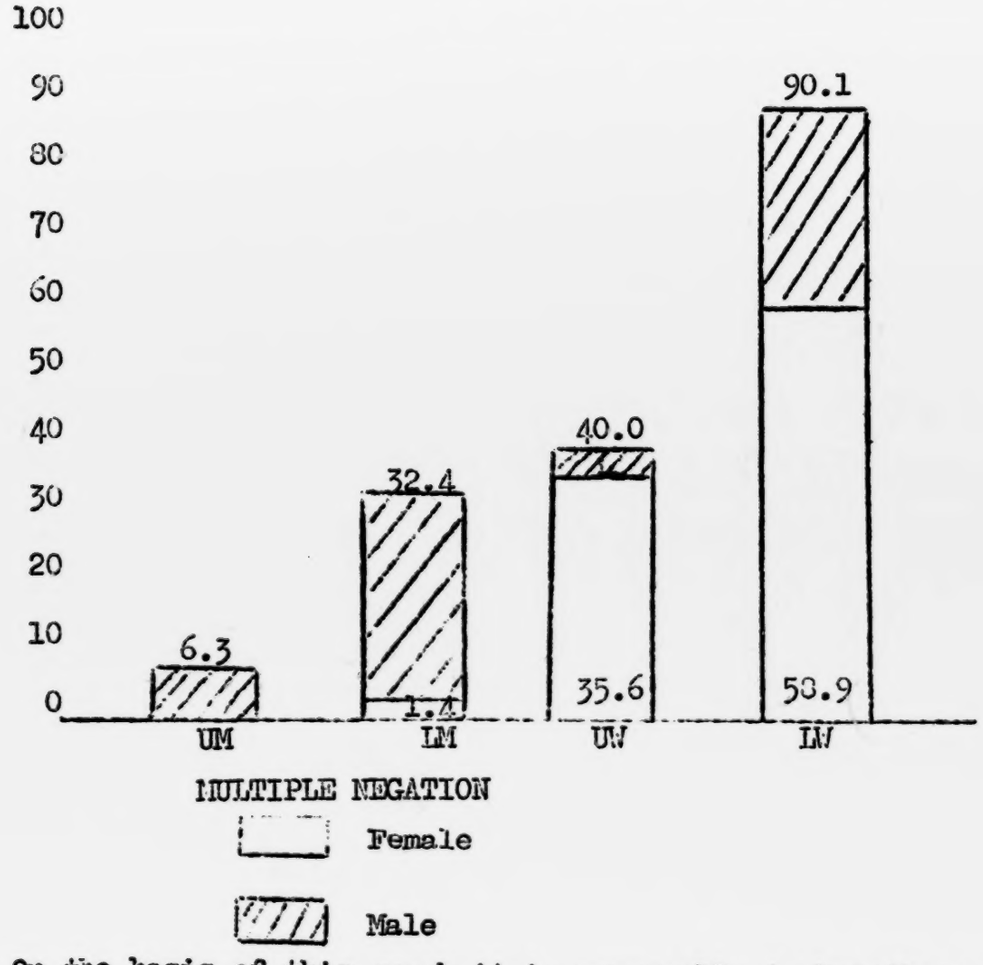
The Evidence from Language Data

Some preliminary findings on the differences between male and female language were noted in Shuy, Wolfram and Riley (1967). In that study the authors attempted to set the linguistic data in appropriate sociological contexts by using a modified Hollingshead scale to assign a social number to each person in that city. The spectrum of assigned social status numbers, which ranged from the highest, 20, to the lowest, 134, was then arbitrarily quartiled.

Having established a tentative social population, the next task was to extract relevant linguistic data from certain of the some 700 tape-recorded, hour long interviews of randomly selected Detroit

residents and to display some of these data with the social classes in which they occurred. The following figure is illustrative:

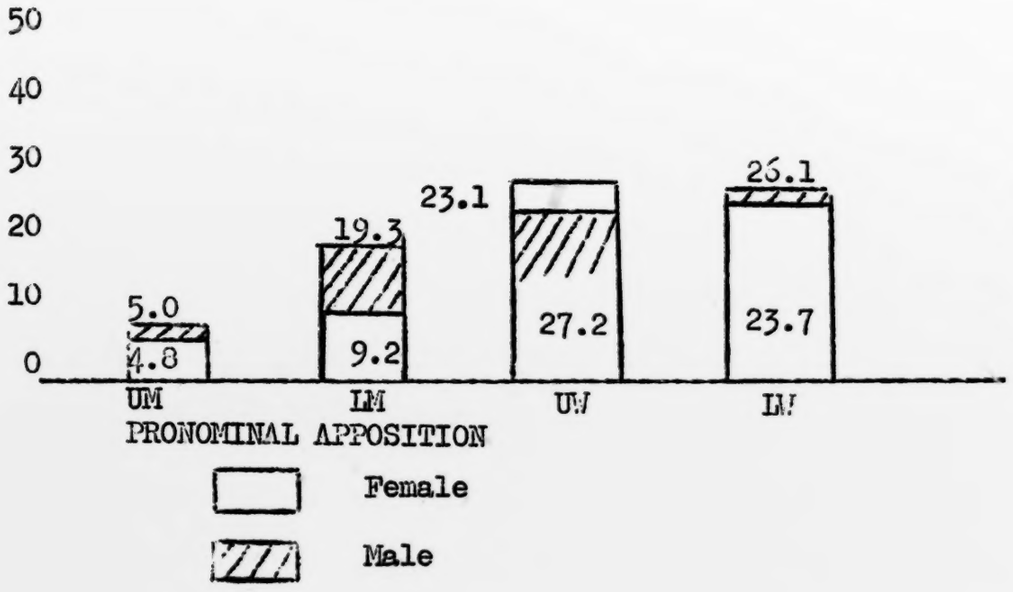
FIGURE 1



On the basis of this graph it is reasonable to hypothesize that women show a greater "sensitivity" to multiple negation as an index of social stratification than men.

Likewise in the feature, pronominal apposition, as in "my brother he went to the park," correlates with certain social facts, including sex, as the following graph reveals:

FIGURE 2



This feature illustrates somewhat of a refinement of the kind of data revealed by the study of multiple negation. Whereas in figure 1 there was consistent difference in the frequency of occurrence of multiple negation across all socio-economic groups, with pronominal apposition the difference is essentially in one class only, the lower middle group.

In addition to grammatical features, such as those noted previously, phonological features may also be observed in relation to social categories such as sex. The nasal vowel, which seems to operate as a kind of substitute for a word final nasal consonant, will serve as our example. It is observed in words like man, in which the realization is /mæ̃/. For this phenomenon males produced

the nasalized vowel substitute 17.5% of the time while females produced it only 12.9%, a slight, but nevertheless predictable, result.*

Another phonological feature which shows a clear cut distribution between the sexes is the realization of -in' in participial -ing constructions. Males realize -ing as -in' 62.2% of the time while females produce -in' only 28.9%. This supports the findings of an earlier research project on participial -ing by John L. Fischer in which his smaller and more socially restricted study revealed that this phenomenon patterned according to sex (1958).

More recently, Walter Wolfram (1969) has been revising and extending the earlier preliminary Detroit findings and has been lending further evidence to the literature on sex differences in English. One contrast to the preceeding observation must be noted, however. Wolfram's focus has been on the Negro population alone.

Wolfram's research includes work on several phonological and grammatical features. It will not be our purpose here to summarize all of his research but only to note a few further observations relating to sex differences.

In the case of word final consonant clusters when followed by a non-consonantal environment, females seem to show a greater awareness than males to the social consequences of cluster final absence. Males exceed the females in deleting the final consonant in such clusters by 14% (57.8 to 43.7). The same female sensitivity obtains with respect to morpheme medial and final th /θ/ as in nothing and tooth,

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* Other evidence shows that this phenomenon is produced more by Negroes than by whites and more by teen agers than by children or adults.

which are often realized by the labio-dental fricative /f/ by working class Negroes or by alveolar stop t, or even by zero, ø by others.

TABLE 1

Percentage of f, t and ø Realization by Sex

	Male	Female
UMN	14.6	9.6
LMN	21.9	12.3
UWN	70.1	47.5
LWN	72.3	70.2

Table 1 illustrates a consistent pattern of difference correlated with sex. Females of all socio-economic status have fewer f, t or ø realizations of th. The total for all classes varies about 10% by sex (females 34.9% and males 44.7). Again, females come closer than males at approximating the norm.

Likewise the incidence of r absence shows consistent variation across social classes by males and females:

TABLE 2

Percentage of r Absence

	Male	Female
UMN	33.3	10.0
LMN	47.5	30.0
UWN	80.0	55.0
LWN	75.0	68.3

Again the pattern of female sensitivity to socially diagnostic features is greater than that of males.

This consistent greater sensitivity is also revealed in the zero realization of plurals, possessives, third singular verb inflections and in the copula/auxiliary. The latter shows a distribution quite si similar to the preceeding tables and figures.

TABLE 3

Percentage of Zero Realization

Copula/Auxiliary

	Male	Female
UMN	6.4	3.1
LMN	16.4	5.3
UWN	45.3	28.7
LWN	66.3	47.5

This table displays, once again, clear evidence of the relative greater sensitivity of females over males in linguistic features which evidence social diagnosticity.

On the other hand, Wolfram's investigation of the devoicing phenomenon which occurs in word final stops (e.g. bed realized as /bɛd/ or /bɛ/) revealed only very slight differences between the sexes. The frequency of devoicing to /t/ for males is 32.4% while for females it is 31.0%. The devoicing to ∅ for all males is 15.7% and for females, 12.2%. One might ask why the difference is so slight with this linguistic feature when the frequency of occurrence seems to be regular with other features.

Two possible answers suggest themselves. Subjective observation causes us to believe that the devoicing phenomenon is one of the last features to be assimilated by upwardly mobile Negroes. They are, apparently, less conscious of this feature as a socially diagnostic

marker than they are of many other such features. Indeed it has been little discussed in the literature of speech correction, English, language arts, reading or, for that matter, linguistics. Secondly. as part of the tradition of distinct articulation there seems to be a favorable predisposition to the phenomenon of devoicing. Small children playing school will hypercorrect words like ladder as /lᵃtər/ and bad as /bæt/. Teachers trying to be perfectly distinct in enunciating a spelling lesson will distort such words in a similar fashion. Singers will devoice, for elegant effect, in some positions. As a consequence, it is likely that the feature which has social diagnosticity, especially for Negroes, has been neutralized by both hypercorrection and by a kind of general unawareness of its social consequence.

At this point it should be noted, moreover, that much has been made of the positon of the Negro female in the ghetto culture. Perhaps the most famous treatise on this subject is Daniel Moynihan's The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (1965), which points to the deterioration of the Negro family as the source of a ghetto tangle of pathologies of violence, poor school performance, delinquency, etc. The cause of the trouble, Moynihan suggests, is that the family is female-headed, a fact which he considers an aberration greatly in need of remediation, although he is generally vague about what makes women dominant. In general, Moynihan does not consider the possibility that this female dominance might be an adaptation to the given social situation. Ulf Hannerz observes for example, that Negro women may well be more familiar with mainstream culture than men are because of (1) job distribution (Negro women often work in public contact jobs while men do not) (2) the effects of Aid

for Dependent Children (which excludes families with an employable male, sometimes causing fathers to desert their families) and (3), the effect of (1) and (2) on developing the female into the family's external affairs expert which is exactly the opposite of the mainstream family's culture structure (Hannerz, 1968).

At this point, it would appear that Hannerz's explanation should account for the Negro females' normative language behavior. Since they are often called upon to act as the family's external affairs expert, they have been required to learn the mainstream language norms. However appealing this argument may be, it fails to explain the normativeness of young Negro girls who do not serve as external affairs experts and who do not work as waitresses or maids in mainstream environment. Nor does it explain why white women maintain about the same degree of normativeness over their males as Negro women do over theirs. On the contrary, one would expect the reverse to be true of the middle class white family: that where men serve as the external affairs experts, men's language would be more normative than women's. Figures 1 and 2 show this not to be the case.

A similar study of three low vowels in Detroit speech revealed patterns of fronting which correlate with sex (Fasold 1968). In this study, Ralph Fasold selected 93 speakers from the Detroit Dialect Study corpus. For the vowels, /æ/, /a/, and /ɔ/ Fasold found that fronting was consistently more characteristic of the lower middle class speaker than of the upper middle class or working classes. He found, further, that women outscored men in the fronting of all three vowels, particularly at the lower middle class. The following table is illustrative:

TABLE 4

Percent of Vowel Fronting

	M /ɔ/	F	M /æ/	F	M /a/	F
UM	22.7	34.5	37	48	66	69
LM	26.0	59.0	35	67	64	88
W	19.0	28.0	38	40	84	61

Further analysis by Fasold revealed that it was the younger informants who predominated in fronting these vowels, particularly young white females of the lower middle class. These data reflect an earlier observation by Levine and Crockett in their study of post vocalic r in North Carolina. They observed that the community's march toward the national norm is spearheaded by women, young people and those who are near but are not quite at the top of the "white collar" class (Levine and Crockett 1967, pp. 97-98).

Subjective Reactions to Language Data

The search for the relationship of language to sex need not be limited merely to objective language performance. Recent research on the sociolinguistic factors involved in speech identification (Shuy, Baratz and Wolfram, 1969) provides another format for observing this relationship. This study used a tape stimulus which included 21 discourses of between 20 and 30 seconds each which were taken from the Detroit Dialect Study tape file. All samples were from the tapes of adult, male Detroit residents between the ages of 30 and 55. Three speakers represented each of the upper middle, lower middle, upper working and lower working classes of the Detroit Negro population. Also included were three speakers in each of the upper middle, lower middle and upper working classes of the Detroit whites.

The judges, or respondents to the tape stimulus, were 620 Detroit residents, about equally divided between sixth graders, eleventh graders and adults. About 40% were Negroes and 60% white. Half were male and half female and they divided about equally between four social classes.

The task of these judges was to identify the race of the taped speaker, to place him in a socio-economic group identified by education and occupation and to respond to several seven point semantic differential scales like the following:

awkward ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: graceful

relaxed ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: ___: tense

Although for almost every linguistic feature we have analyzed to date there is a rather clear performance difference between male and female speech, the subjective reaction and speech identification tasks provided so little difference as to be puzzling.

Males (all ages) were slightly, but insignificantly, better than females (all ages) at identifying the race of the speaker as Table 4 attests:

Table 5

Effect of Sex of Respondent on Identification of Race of Speaker

	Stimuli	
Respondent	Negro	White
Male (all ages)	80.2	82.6
Female (all ages)	79.8	79.9

Following Hannerz's theory, Negro adult females should be more able than Negro male adults to identify white speakers. This is borne out 74.4% to 71.6%, respectively, but not with convincing definitiveness.

Exactly why the language responses should reveal clear differences between the sexes while the reactive judgments do not is a subject for considerable speculation. One would think, for example, that awareness of language norms might be made more readily in receptive or judgmental modes rather than in speech production. That is, if a person is aware of a norm, he is likely to be aware of it in others more than in himself. That this has not been the case suggests several possibilities: (1) that our data are atypical (2) that people do produce language forms before they are consciously aware of them (3) that some kind of different rules obtain for using language than for observing it, (4) that women continue to be one of the mysteries of the universe.

Whatever the cause, it is clear that considerable further research must be done on the judgmental aspect of sex differences in language.

Conclusion

This paper has focussed on recent evidence from sociolinguistic research on sex contrasts in language. We have observed several clear differences in objective language data and have speculated about their causes. We have observed that there are relatively few differences between the sexes in subjective language identifications and judgements and we have not yet tried to speculate about this. We conclude by observing that only recently have the research techniques of contemporary sociolinguistics developed which enable us to approach the question of sex differences in language. Poets like Ogden Nash have known about these differences for years but it has taken the discipline of sociolinguistics to find a way to prove that they do indeed exist and we can no longer be accused of going to have not discovered them.

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